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Preacher: Bishop Robert Duncan

[0 : 00] I preach to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The first verse of the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.

After this, the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come.

The theme of what I want to say to all of you gathered here together today, is about being sent on ahead of him.

Being sent on ahead of Jesus. About being the preparation rather than the main event. About being the preparation rather than the main event.

I want to say, as I begin to preach, just what a joy it is to be here with all of you. Indeed, I have known for years now the name of St. John's Shaughnessy.

[1 : 12] It is great to be among you. I just visited two weeks ago with David Short, so I feel as though I've had a recent connection with him, as well as with the other clergy, and it's just a joy to be here.

I want to say some things about my own life in these last months, about the turmoil and the tumult of the days and weeks and months since the 5th of August in the American Church, the day on which the House of Bishops ratified the election of Gene Robinson to be Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire.

Again, that action is not about the presenting issue, which is about human sexuality and about the boundaries of what God intends for sexual relations in his creation.

It's not principally about that. It's really about the Word of God and the authority of Scripture and whether Jesus can be trusted in his Word. And I want to say to you that Jesus can be trusted in his Word, and his Word is reliable.

That's fundamentally what this whole thing is about. And the tumult and the turmoil comes, as you well know, in this part of God's kingdom, in this particular diocese.

[2 : 44] You know that when a synod airs, when a synod says, what's false is true and what's unrighteous is righteous, then there's nothing but tumult and turmoil for God's people and indeed for the society around.

Everything changed in August for us, just as everything changed for you after the synod in 2002.

We moved from essentially within church life from peacetime to wartime.

We moved in a way in which unity, which we'd always striven for, was just no longer possible within the body of Christ, that kind of unity which only Christ can give.

And when some part separates itself from Christ, then that unity is fractured. And that's the situation in which we've been living, the situation in which many of you have been living. It's a season of all kinds of plans abandoned.

In our diocese, in our missionary diocese, in the last decade, we've had growth in our churches every year. We've had growth in the number of baptized people. We've had growth in the resources of the parishes.

[4 : 00] We've actually had growth in parishes, new congregations being formed. But with August of 2003, we sense that all that is suspended for a time, as churches fracture, as people split, as folks have to declare where they stand.

And my plans as bishop are radically altered every day since the 5th of August. As one wonderful woman who keeps the desk in the office building that I serve in, she said to me as I came in on Tuesday morning this week, she said, Ah, Bishop, there's scarce a day that I don't see you in the news.

And I said, Well, Elaine, yesterday the newspaper article wasn't very good, was it? She said, Oh, Bishop, all news that you're in is good to me. She's part of the warfare on our side as opposed to the enemy's side.

But my life was never like that. We had liberals in our diocese who just prayed for years, and, you know, pled with me for years to get into the news, to make the Episcopal Church just as well known in our part of the world as the Roman Catholic Churches.

And you know what? Their plea and their prayer has been answered. But let me tell you, the liberals aren't happy that I'm as much in the news as I am. Again, I have sought to be in the news, farthest thing from me, but it's what's happened.

[5 : 39] It's what this tumult and this turmoil, and I, who used to be afraid to ever have to confront a TV camera or the live radio spot or whatever it was, the newspaper journalist, I've just gotten used to it.

I've told my secretary, Well, when they call, sure, put them through, because this is a multi-million dollar public relations campaign that somebody else is paying for.

And they're actually letting me talk about the gospel on the airwaves. You know? I mean, well, this is, this is, I mean, you know, there's a really bright side to what's happened.

I mean, you know, I'm able to say, well, you know, this is what this thing's really about. It's really about the love of God and how vast that love is. Anybody who wants to come to Him, He'll receive. It's just that when He receives you, He asks you to love Him back in His way, according to His order and His discipline. And the church is saying that we don't have to change.

[6 : 47] The church is saying we don't have to be transformed. We don't, we don't have to be made different. We don't have to live in a way that's apart from the world. We, we can be in the world. The church is, is attempting to say now, not only in it, but of it.

But we say, no, we must be in it, but we can't be of it. That's what it's been like for the last eight months. There is also the, the season in which everything, I mean, all the, all the meetings are, everything is a new creation.

There's scarcely a meeting where I don't preside over. And I think some of the leaders here in New West understand how all of a sudden there are all these meetings and everything's a new creation. No one had an answer to how to do this.

No one ever imagined that the church authorities could go astray and that the people of God would have to figure out how to be the church in the midst of an errant church. At least not in this part of the world. Everything's a new creation.

Now, let me, let me say that this has been a stressful time. And it's in that context that I was invited to go to the enthronement of Henry Arambi, the new archbishop of Uganda.

[8 : 02] He was to be enthroned in Namarambi Cathedral on St. Paul's Day, the 25th of January. Just, just passed. And I was actually asked to, to go and be there in place of the American presiding bishop.

Because the church in Uganda and its boldness and its zeal simply said, what's happened in the, in, in the Episcopal church is unacceptable. It's unchristian. It's not speaking the truth.

And they uninvited the presiding bishop and his entourage and said, no thanks to American money. And, and they invited me and my, you know, what a silly idea.

You know, a boy from a small town who's just nowhere and nothing. And, you know, here I am seated with the primates at the, at the right horn of the high altar in Namarambi Cathedral with the primates of Congo.

And, and Kenya and Sudan as we're making the new primate of, of Uganda. Anyways, in that context that I was invited to go to Uganda.

[9 : 08] And I actually, you know, it's, it's kind of difficult to, to decide in these times. You get an awful lot of, you get to get an awful lot of attack. Um, when, when you're trying to stand for what's right.

And you don't actually, my wife is reminding me all the time that I don't need to take absolutely every bullet that's intended for me. Um, sometimes I could duck, but anyway, I decided to go to Uganda. She, she gets a lot of bullets that miss me.

Oh, we can laugh about it because we know the joy of heaven and it's all going to be all right. Um, at any rate, I decided to go to Uganda to encourage our people because I knew if, if, if, if, if the Ugandans wanted to put me in that place, it was a sign for them that they were putting them in that

place and that faithfulness would be recognized all around the communion.

The global Anglicanism was not going to let us, not going to let us go. Anyway, I went to encourage others and what happened in Uganda was that God really wanted to speak to me.

And it's out of his speaking to me that I want to speak to you. Um, God wanted to give me, I think, a new understanding of the text that I read to you.

[10:29] And it's from our gospel reading this morning, those opening words of the 10th chapter of Luke. After this, the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of him two by two into every town and place where he himself was about to come.

We often think about the way in which we're to follow Jesus. But there's a sense in which we're actually to go out and precede him, to go before him where he's about to come.

And I think there's no place in, in modern Christendom or there are few places in modern Christendom that better illustrate the point than the church in Uganda.

As I was lined up in this marvelous procession to go into Namorimbi Cathedral to, to, to, to be part of the enthronement of Archbishop Arambi.

As, as I was there, it happened that the procession stopped not far from the cemetery that's before the west doors and the equivalent of, out there where the, the main road is.

[11:45] There's a, there's a small cemetery. And buried just inside of the gate of that cemetery, on the right hand side, is James Hannington. Now he wasn't originally buried there, but his bones, his remains, were eventually brought up to be buried there, on this high cathedral site, above the city of Kampala.

Hannington went out, as the first bishop of equatorial Africa. He went out in the fall of 1885.

He crossed Lake Victoria, from what's now Tanzania, to what's now Uganda. He landed on the shores, with his companions, and was there met by, soldiers, by, by the guard, of King Mwanga. And, he and his companions, there on the shores of Lake Victoria, were tortured for a week, and executed on the 27th of October, in 1885.

Hannington, never made it, any further, than the beach. And yet, Hannington is today, buried outside the west door, of the Archiepiscopal Cathedral.

[13:17] And why is that? Think about, think about the plans, that Hannington must have had. What it was, he'd come to Uganda to do.

His last words, were go tell King Mwanga, I paved the way to Uganda, with my blood. that's all he was able to do, but that surely, was not his plan.

What God, began to say to me, as I prepared, to go into the cathedral, where the 7th, Archbishop of Uganda, was to be enthroned, was that, sometimes, we serve God best, when we, we sacrifice, our own plans.

Things don't always go, as we had anticipated. But those who will go, before Jesus, into every town, and village, where he's about to come, will surely, prepare his way.

Of course, because I'm, generally, kind of dis, and I don't always get it, the Lord makes sure, that I have multiple messages, so I get, the point.

[14:38] The, the, the other great story, associated with, Uganda, are the, martyrs, of Uganda, happened in the spring, of 1886.

How many are there here, who are in their 20s? Would you just stand up? I, I knew I was safe, with the choir here. Yeah. Okay. All right.

Okay. Thank you. Um, that's almost, as many 20 year olds, as were executed, on June the 3rd, Ascension Day, in the year 1886.

Um, they were pages, of that same King, Mwanga. They were pages, who'd come, to, claim Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Savior.

Some were actually, baptized on the death march, to Namagongo. Both Anglican, and Roman Catholic, 34, they were all boys, who served the King.

[15:42] The ages, most of them, were in their 20s. They were as young as 14, and as old as 35. The senior among them, Charles Luanga, was 24.

He'd catechized, all the rest. They were, wrapped in, in, in sticks, in dry wood, piled up, and, burnt alive.

They died, it is said, singing songs of praise, singing the hymns, they'd learned, as catechumens. Their plans, must have been, very different, for their lives.

Having just met, that new King Jesus, and, been promised, a new, and, fulfilling, abundant life, with Him. They were given, ample opportunity, to escape, one of those, boys who was, martyred, was the nephew, of the executioner.

But, they wouldn't run away, from what they knew, was certain death. They gave up, their plans. And, of course, Uganda, was changed.

[17 : 00] It's now, brothers and sisters, the most Christian, country in Africa, and it's the most, Anglican country, in the world. No wonder, with Tertullian, we know, that, the blood of the martyrs, is the seed, of the church.

The final piece, in this, and I've, spoken to you, longer, probably, than I should have done, is the, seated, at the, very, right hand, side of the altar, in Namorimbi Cathedral, I was reminded, of the fourth, Archbishop of Uganda, Janini Lawum.

He served, as Archbishop, for only three years, before, Idi Amin, personally, executed him. He died, in February, of 1977.

And that Sunday, while it was, illegal to do so, every Christian, in Uganda, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, all the rest, took their Bibles, and walked the streets, of Uganda, in absolute defiance, of the, dictator, and terrorist, who ruled their country.

I know, Lawum, must have had, great plans too. But he had to, give them all up, to be faithful to Jesus. The point, I'm making here, for all of us, who serve, in difficult times, with the, author of the letter, to the Hebrews, is, we have not yet, sacrificed, to the point, of shedding blood, so, never mind, let's get on, with it.

[18 : 49] Let's, let's, look at the, cloud of witnesses, literally, martyrs, who surround us, cheering from the side, in the, stadium of this, conflict.

Let's admit, and even grieve, that so many of our plans, and so many of the nice things, that we imagined, would be true for us, and for our children, in our day, and in this part of the world, that those things, are all gone now, in this tumult, and turmoil, but let's remember, that we are not, the main event, Jesus is, our task, is to be sent on, ahead of him, into every place, where he, is about to come, and if the church, were clearer, that that was its role, not its grand plans, or great comforts, if the church, were clearer, that it was its role, to go on, ahead of him, into every town, and village, where he was about to come, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, saying, the kingdom of God, has come near to you, if we were to give up, our plans, which is what we're being, asked to do just now, recognizing, that it's not about us, but it is about him, that he is the one, with the plan, and if he can do it, with the failed ministries, of James Hannington, and those, young martyrs, and that archbishop, who stood, and was executed, if we could stand with them, his plan, would come, our plans, don't actually matter, his plan, for Uganda, was a better plan, than any of those martyrs had, and the truth, my brothers and sisters, is that his plan, for us, is far better, than any plan, we could have, after this, the Lord, appointed 70 others, like us, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town, and place, where he, himself, was about to come, amen.